Evaluation of UNESCO’s Regional Conventions on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education

Committee on Conventions and Recommendations

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Background: Conventions

- 5 regional + 1 inter-regional conventions 1974-1983
- 1993 Recommendation
- Europe revision 1997 Lisbon Convention, now embedded in Bologna Process
- Asia-Pacific and Africa Conventions not in force yet
- Preparations for LA and Global Convention ongoing
Background: Evaluation

- **Purpose**: findings and recommendations to inform the development, management and implementation of the new generation of conventions, and feed into a potential future global convention

- **Focus on**:
  - importance and role of conventions,
  - governance and management,
  - effectiveness of UNESCO support.
Background: Evaluation

- **Methodology**: desk study; 100 interviews; field missions to Bangkok, Nairobi, Addis Ababa; observation of regional meetings and capacity building events; drawing on experience with other UNESCO Conventions

- **Challenges**: no baseline, lack of data on implementation, lack of statistical data overall; high workload of staff
Importance and role of the Conventions

Recognition conventions are relevant:

- Mobility of students and workers increasing
- Conventions are the only standard-setting instruments on recognition at regional levels
- Contain provisions for recognition of qualifications of refugees
- Trade agreements and other mechanisms contain provisions on recognition
- Higher Education is now a priority (eg. SDGs, World Bank etc.)
Challenges:

- Ratification low (with the exception of Europe) – misunderstandings, political concerns, autonomy of universities, long ratification processes.
- Need to include a more complete set of indicators in C/5 (in line with ED Strategy on standard-setting instruments)
Europe (1997 Lisbon Conv.): strong governance mechanism (and strong ENIC/NARIC network)

1st generation of Conventions:
Asia & Pacific: governance mechanism functional
Others: not meeting, not facilitating implementation of Conventions

1993 Recommendation:
• Committee on Conventions and Recommendations
Monitoring and reporting:

- Monitoring and reporting on first generation of Conventions largely insufficient
- This is one of the main challenges encountered in the standard-setting work on recognition
- Exception Asia & Pacific: some follow up happening
- Exception Europe: recent monitoring initiative.
Management Mechanisms – Lessons

- Monitoring mechanism needs to be improved: indicators, objectives, time-lines, periodic reporting to feed into Committee decisions
- Evolving guidelines ensure that conventions remain relevant
- Continuity of Committee, Secretariat activities during the year is essential
- Committee / Bureau / Chair / Networks need TOR, workplans
- Involvement of a variety of stakeholders needed (Academia, students, RECs, private sector)
- Importance of networks
- Cooperation / exchange between convention secretariats important
UNESCO Support – Achievements

Internal Oversight Service

- Ongoing Secretariat support to existing Conventions governance mechanisms and meetings (Europe, Asia & Pacific)
- Provides co-Secretariat to ENIC Network
- Involvement in Bologna follow-up group (Diploma Supplement)
- Development of two revised conventions (Asia & Pacific, Africa)
- Efforts towards revised LA Convention, Global Convention ongoing
- Knowledge exchange between regions (good practice)
- Increased awareness of Ministries of Education, Parliamentarians (Africa)
- Tools (e.g. Guidelines for National Information Centres) etc.
UNESCO Support – Findings

• Convention Secretariats lack capacities
• Workload likely to increase in the future
• Lack of a ‘compelling story’ that responds to sub-regional context
• Achievements not always sustained over time
• FOs (other than Convention Secretariats) not much involved in recognition work
• Main partner remains education sector
UNESCO support – Way Forward

• Ensure continued relevance of the Conventions to all stakeholders
  • Explore relevance of Conventions to regional / global trade agreements
  • Involve regional organizations in awareness raising
  • Collect data on mobility and recognition that helps demonstrate importance of the Conventions and monitor progress in implementation

• Develop a ‘good story’ (or several)!
• Raise awareness within UNESCO (FOs)
• Engage stakeholders beyond the education sector (Labour, Foreign Affairs, etc.)
• Strengthen governance of the Conventions
• Improve management and coordination of UNESCO’s support activities (HQ – Fos)
UNESCO support – Way Forward

- Be more strategic:
  - Work with champion countries
  - Identify champions inside UNESCO
  - Use networks (Chairs, NatComs, Academia)
  - Use other networks (Association of Universities network etc.)
  - Identify entry points for advocacy (f.ex. regional meetings of Deans)
  - Long-term fund-raising (vs. piecemeal approach)
  - Alternative modalities of capacity building and advocacy
- Sustain efforts over the years and improve follow-up
- Apply a gender lens to the work on the recognition conventions.
ED sector follow up on evaluation

• ED Management Response: welcomes IOS evaluation
• Action Plan: pending
• IOS annual follow-up on implementation of Action Plan

• Access the full report on IOS’ website:
Thank you!